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INFORMATION PAPER

25 February 2002

SUBJECT: Disability Action - Supreme Court Decision in Williams vs Toyota

PURPOSE: To provide recent information on Reasonable Accommodation

BACKGROUND:

- Reasonable accommodation requires an agency to accommodate the known physical or mental limitations of an applicant, or employee, who is a qualified individual with a disability, unless the agency can demonstrate the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the operation of its program. 29 C.F.R 1614.203(c)(1).
- An individual with a disability is one who: (1) has a physical or mental impairment, which **substantially limits one or more of the person's major life activities**; (2) has a record of such impairment; or (3) is regarded as having such an impairment. 29 C.F.R. 1614.203(a)(1).
- **Substantially limits** is defined as the inability to perform a major life activity, or significant restriction as to condition, manner or duration with which a person performs a major life activity compared to the average person. 42 USC 12102, 29 C.F.R. 1630.2j.

NEW RULING OF LAW:

- A unanimous Supreme Court narrowed the definition of disability when it found that a worker with carpal tunnel syndrome was not "disabled" under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Williams v. Toyota Motor Manufacturing, No. 00-1089 (U.S. Jan. 8, 2002).
- The Court stated that in order to demonstrate that the individual is substantially limited in performing manual tasks, an individual must have an impairment that prevents or severely restricts the individual from doing activities that are of central importance to most people's lives. The impairment's impact must also be permanent or long-term.
- The law does not protect a person whose carpal tunnel syndrome limits only the person's ability to perform certain work-related manual tasks. The tasks must be the kind of tasks that are of central importance to most people's daily lives.
- Household chores, bathing, and brushing one's teeth are among the types of manual tasks of central importance to people's live and, should be part of the assessment of whether an individual is limited in performing manual tasks.

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SUBJECT: Meetings Attended by Support Contractors' Employees

- The Supreme Court remanded the case to the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit (Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee) and said that the Court must examine evidence regarding tasks that are central to most people's lives. Thus, the Sixth Circuit erred when it looked at a class of manual tasks associated with some assembly line jobs.

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